

Pastor Bill Sass – Sermon for Sunday, August 16, 2020

“Out of Order?”

Matthew 15:10-28

In today’s Gospel lesson, A Canaanite woman pleads with Jesus for help. “O Lord, Son of David,” she cries out, “Have mercy on me; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon.” At first, Jesus ignores her. Because the woman is not a Jew, Jesus’ disciples tell him to send her away. Jesus seems to agree. He reminds her of the popular impression of His ministry. “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel,” He says. But the woman persists. She kneels down and pleads, “Lord, help me.”

Then, using the disdainful word the Jews applied to Gentile “Pagans” in those days, Jesus replies, “It is not fair to take the children’s bread, and throw it to the dogs.” To which the woman replies, “Yes, Lord, yet even dogs eat crumbs from their master’s table.” (Matthew 15:25, 26, 27). And this observation leads to the point in today’s lesson.

There would no longer be any division between Jew and Gentile; when it would become plain that in God’s plan, salvation is open to each of them. The lesson can be seen as God’s universal will. In other words, Christianity cannot be contained, or confined, or isolated. Christianity extends out into the world. The rule of God is open to all. God does not play favorites! God’s creative intention for each human being is eternal in His kingdom of love.

The woman in today’s lesson believed that she said “No!” to the notion that she and her daughter were less valuable, less precious in God’s eyes, than people in the House of Israel, or anywhere else. And so Jesus says to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” Her daughter was healed instantly. (Matthew 15:28). The child who had been “Out of Order” inside— “severely possessed by a demon”-- was made whole again through her mother’s faith in God’s love and mercy for all.

In a poem called OUT OF ORDER, the author describes how he felt when he saw a young mother and her four year old son standing at a popcorn machine. The mother says,

“You can’t get any popcorn, child. The machine is out of order. See, there is a sign on the machine.” But he didn’t understand. After all, he had the desire; and he had the money; and he could see popcorn in the machine. And yet, somehow, somewhere, something was wrong because he couldn’t get the popcorn.

The boy walked back with his mother. And he wanted to cry. And Lord, I too felt like weeping, weeping for people who have become locked-in, jammed, broken machines filled with goodness other people need and want, and yet will never come to enjoy, because somehow, somewhere, something has gone wrong inside.

In a book called, ADAM AND EVE AND PINCOCCHIO, the author, an eminent psychiatrist, observes that people of the western world no longer look upon humanity as the masterpiece of divine creation “In an ordered universe.” Instead, he says, we often describe ourselves as failures in a world of chaotic events. “We are losing faith,” he writes, “not only in our institutions, but in ourselves.” He says that unless we begin to “fully value and understand what makes us human, our culture is critically close to a tilt-point that could lead to our destruction.” Oh yes...especially now.

Whether or not we agree with this book, if our self-esteem falls short of the Good News that we are infinitely precious in God’s eyes, that God loves us beyond our ability even to imagine, then something is out of order inside and we are failing ourselves, and failing others. If you don’t really believe God loves you, why should you believe that He loves me? If you don’t really believe that you are worthwhile, why should you believe it of anyone else?

Many years ago at the University of Wisconsin, there was an undergraduate Literary Club—a group of brilliant male students who had demonstrated considerable talent for writing. At each meeting, one member would read aloud a story, or essay, he had written, and then submit it to the criticism of the others. When criticism got underway, no punches were pulled. Nothing was held back. The material was mercilessly dissected, almost line by line. So brutal were the sessions that the members called themselves “the stranglers.”

Then a similar club was formed. It was called “The Wranglers,” and membership consisted of female undergraduates who had demonstrated considerable literary talent. They, too, read their manuscripts aloud at their meetings, and then

submitted them to the other member's critiques. But there was a significant difference in the criticism. It was exceedingly gentle. In fact, there was almost none at all. The Wranglers tried to find kind things to say. They spoke in positive, rather than negative terms. The key attitude was encouragement, even for the most feeble efforts.

About twenty years after "The Stranglers" and "Wranglers" had been started, a University alumnus made an analysis of the members' careers. She discovered that not one of the bright, young talents in "The Stranglers" had made a literary reputation of any kind. On the other hand, "The Wranglers" had produced half a dozen prominent, successful writers. The basic talent in the two groups had been much the same.

The Wranglers uplifted and encouraged one another to believe in themselves, to esteem themselves highly and aspire to their true worth. But the Stranglers did exactly the opposite, promoting self-doubt, and self-discouragement, and low self-esteem. In choosing a name for themselves, "The Stranglers" had been wiser than they realized. So sad...

If you are at a point where the inner-strangler's voice is telling you that your life is meaningless, worthless, going nowhere, then you're "Out of Order." Somehow, somewhere, something is wrong inside. You need a spiritual tune-up—maybe even a complete overhaul.

You need to reorder your life on the Good News that God is for you; that God has a wonderful plan for your life, for His blessed kingdom. You need to reorder your response on the further Good News that God is for all His children, in that very same way.

The ultimate in self-esteem comes in God's loving presence within you; knowing that God Almighty is with you, and that God really cares about you. High regard and esteem for others comes in the certain knowledge that God is also with them, and God really cares about them, too!

AMEN